

NEWS > ENVIRONMENT • News

## Groundwater report could ease residents' concerns about future East Bay wetland

Conservation group's report shows little impact of restored wetland on area groundwater but residents still concerned



KNIGHTSEN, CALIFORNIA – JANUARY 04: Farmland purchased by the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy and the East Bay Regional Park District is seen from this drone view along Eagle Lane near Byron Highway in Knightsen,



By **JUDITH PRIEVE** | [jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News

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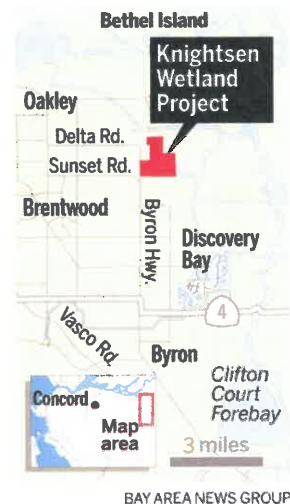
A planned wetland in far eastern Contra Costa County is not likely to affect the nearby groundwater, a new report concludes – but it remains to be seen if that will sway some neighbors who fear the project could harm their drinking water drawn from wells.

The 645-acre wetland project aims to curb potential flooding and poor stormwater quality while fending off encroaching development and improving habitat for threatened wildlife such as red-legged frogs, fairy shrimp and burrowing owls. The undertaking officially called the Knightsen Wetland Restoration Project, is spearheaded by the East Contra Costa Habitat Conservancy and the East Bay Regional Parks District, which bought the land in 2016.

Residents will have a chance to hear about the restoration project's potential effects on the area's groundwater at an online community [meeting](#) on Wednesday.

To help allay some of the neighbors' worries, the conservancy commissioned a study to evaluate the current conditions and potential effects of proposed wetlands on groundwater. The conservancy will present the findings at the meeting.

"One goal of the groundwater study was to answer questions from the community around potential changes to groundwater near residences along Eagle Lane, Byron Highway and Delta Road – particularly related to septic and

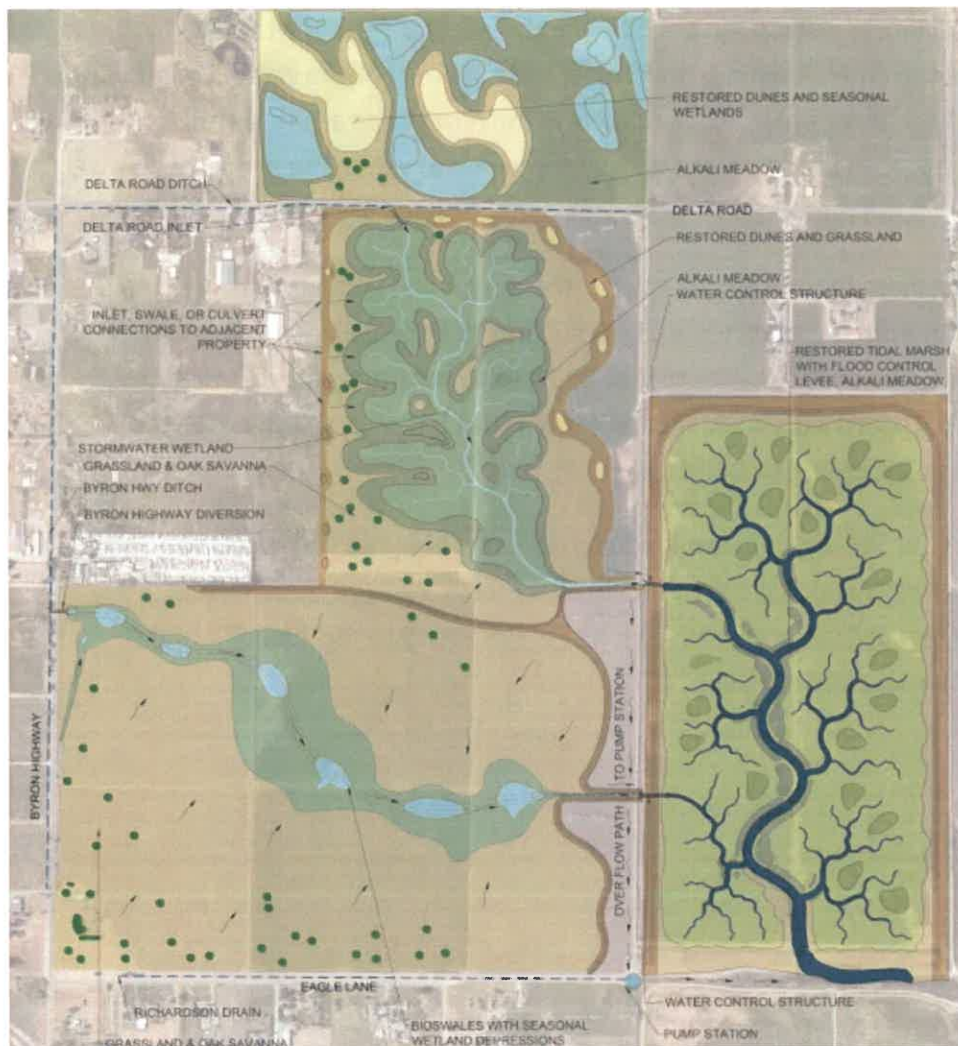


The conclusion, as outlined in the Balance Hydrologics' report, was that overall, as currently designed, the project will not affect offsite groundwater levels in those three areas, while "effects in the north-central and south-central subparcels are small and mostly contained to within the property boundary." It did note that the study was done during a dry year.

The project team has not yet completed the design and it can use the information from the report to make adjustments if needed, according to the consultants. The design is expected to be finished later this year and then the conservancy board will consider whether to move the project forward to the next phases, according to Fateman.

Located in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta east of Byron Highway, the project site was historically a mosaic of tidal marsh, wetland, sand dunes, grassland and oak savanna, with much of the property to the east of it under water before levees were built.





A rendering showing how the 645-acre farmland purchased by the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy and the East Bay Regional Park District will be restored to Delta habitat east of Knightsen. (East Bay Regional Park District)

In recent decades, the land has flooded at times, prompting the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, along with the Knightsen Town Advisory Council, to study ways to address drainage problems in the area. One possible solution, officials say, is to direct and store stormwater, which could be naturally cleaned and filtered through the wetlands before discharge to the Delta.

However, some residents such as Carolynne Steen, who lives on Eagle Lane next to the proposed wetlands, are not convinced that the restored wetland will not harm their drinking water. Steen plans to attend the meeting to voice



"There are many of us who still think this is quite a big experiment since they have never really put a wetland in the middle of an area surrounded by properties that have wells and septic," she said.

Steen said there is a real concern about how changing the topography of the land will affect residents' wells in this rural community as more water is brought into the area and whether it will contaminate the groundwater.

Steen pointed to the January storms and a collapse of East Contra Costa Irrigation's Eagle Lane canal, which caused water to overflow into the area of the proposed wetland as well as to flow back onto properties along Delta Road.

"So, all the water that's supposed to be coming to the wetlands and going out No Name Slough, had nowhere to go and got all backed up," she said.

"Because there was already standing water, which is what they're proposing to do, put standing water on that property."

Trish Bello-Kunkel, a Knightsen Town Community Services director, also was concerned, noting the study was done during a dry season, and this past winter reminded them what could happen with extreme rain and tides.

"When the tides are extreme as they were recently, the water has nowhere to go but backward toward homes," she said. "It brings me back to the recurring common sense question: Why would the wetlands' proponents even consider breaking a levee and allowing in more water?"

Fateman, however, pointed out that that storm was a highly unusual one and the wetland site, which is yet to be built, has not been designed to hold and capture water at this point.

"That is not expected to be an ongoing situation," she said.

Brentwood Mayor Joel Bryant, conservancy board director, meanwhile, sees the completed project as a way to deal with ongoing drainage problems while also improving wildlife habitat.

"The project is really important to give an opportunity to restore some of the habitat that has been there historically, over time, as well as give an





The mayor said the wetlands project also protects the open space from future development sprawl.

“We have all seen the sprawl of development from the core Bay Area out to East County over the years in areas we never dreamed there would be development,” he said.

“I think we have to do everything we can, when possible, to preserve our open space and to preserve our communities for as good a quality of life as we can present our coming generations.”

Though some residents have also questioned whether the future wetlands would be turned into a recreation site attracting visitors, Fateman said no recreational amenities are planned.

But for Steen and others, the project still presents more questions than answers.

“So this is all an experiment. I mean, they can do their best judgments and studies of what they think is gonna happen, but nobody knows what’s going to happen until they actually do it,” Steen said.

The conservancy and parks district will host an open house and another meeting in the next several months detailing its plans for the project, which could break ground in 2025, according to Fateman.

To read the groundwater report, go to <https://tinyurl.com/GroundwaterReport>.

For more information on the project or to attend the upcoming Zoom meeting, go to [www.tinyurl.com/Wetland-Knightsen](https://www.tinyurl.com/Wetland-Knightsen).

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# 1,500 homes planned in Contra Costa County hills

**Residents, environmentalists objected to, construction workers supported the plan**



The hills southwest of the Pittsburg city border are seen beyond the San Marco development. Concord-based Discovery Builders is seeking approval from Pittsburg for its plan to build up to 1,500 homes in the area. (Courtesy of Scott Hein)

By [Judith Prieve](#) | [jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com) |

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A massive housing project in the hills southwest of Pittsburg got the City Council's nod of approval despite some opposition from residents, conservationists and environmentalists.

Monday's 4-0 vote – with Councilman Juan Banales recusing himself – came after the Planning Commission agreed in mid-February not to recommend the project and developer Louis Parsons of Discovery Builders appealed that decision.

Two decades in the making, the Faria/Southwest Hills Annexation Project proposes to build 1,500 homes mostly clustered in the valleys in the southwest Pittsburg hills, just out of the city's limits and overlooking the former Concord Naval Weapons Station.

This week's approvals included a green light for the housing project's master plan, an amendment to the city's general plan and pre-zoning designations, and a development agreement with Faria Land Investors, a Seeno/Discovery Builders associate.

"We've negotiated this over many years," Louis Parsons of Discovery Builders told the council. "We think this is a wonderful opportunity to bring more homes to this area, and to facilitate future commercial development, which we're seeing with the Sprouts coming in (nearby) and other opportunities for commercial that need these residential users."

An earlier version of the Concord developer's project was approved in 2021 despite opposition from hundreds, but the approval was immediately challenged in court by Save Mount Diablo, which argued the development would mar the hills and its habitat between Pittsburg and Concord.

A judge later ruled that the city's environmental review failed to properly analyze the project's effects on air quality, traffic and water and potential impacts of the proposed 150 accessory dwelling units. But on Monday, the council approved the revised environmental documents.

Revised plans eliminated the ADUs, replacing them with \$34,700-per-unit in-lieu fees to build affordable housing, and reduced the development site to 341 acres – concentrating housing in the valley of the 606-acre parcel. Another 265 acres would be open space.

The project will also include a youth recreation center and trails that will connect to the East Bay Regional Park District's future Thurgood Marshall Regional Park at the former Concord Naval Weapons Base.

"The great thing about Faria and this development agreement and staging areas is that you can actually access it (the park) from Pittsburg," City Manager Garret Evans said. "And so this opens up a 2,500-acre park to Pittsburg."

Evans said other benefits include bringing union jobs to the area and spurring needed commercial development with its upscale homes. In addition, the project will generate nearly \$120 million in one-time fees from traffic mitigation, school impact, facility fees and more.

"It brings a needed type of housing stock to Pittsburg," Evans said.

Plans to develop the hills date back to 2005 when voter-approved Measure P placed the Faria site within Pittsburg's urban boundary. The city approved an agreement with Seeno that established guidelines for a permanent greenbelt buffer along the inner edges of the boundary in 2006.

The Concord developer filed an application in 2010, modified it in 2014 and again in 2017 before resurrecting it in 2020. Evans said community input over time has made it "a better project."

Some, though, were not convinced, including Concord Mayor Laura Hoffmeister, who said the city was not against the project but was concerned about its visual impacts, including rooftops and light poles, which might be seen from Concord.

"We think there's been a great improvement made in moving the development further back and respecting the 150 feet (buffer), but it's so close (to the city's border)," she told the council. "We think there's still some refinement needed."

Juan Pablo Galvan Martinez, senior land use manager for Save Mount Diablo, also was concerned about the visual impacts, among other environmental issues, showing a stack of 2,200 paper signatures collected from those opposed to the project.

"Seven different organizations also stated that they were worried about this project, including Save Mount Diablo, Greenbelt Alliance, the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission and the city of Concord," he said.



“We can protect the ridge and you can have your project, but we need a bit more time (to iron out issues),” he added. “I strongly encourage you – four days before Earth Day – to give us a little more time and we can work on a win-win situation.”

Seth Adams, land conservation director for Save Mount Diablo, also asked for the council to continue the item for 45 days, noting the ridge is one of the most beautiful landscape features in Contra Costa County and it should be protected.

With a few tweaks, Adams said the project could move forward while decreasing the visibility of the development for Pittsburg and Concord residents to “make it a more sensitive project.”

“Give us time to make it a better project that works for everyone,” he said.

Resident Ray O’Brien wanted a new developer.

“I believe it’s high time to tell Pittsburg’s favorite son ‘no,’ ” he said. “It’s time to seek a new developer who will give Pittsburg the development it deserves – a world-class development that respects the environment and doesn’t involve amending the city’s general plan to accommodate someone who flaunts laws and regulations, which is the history that Seeno has,” he said.

Others, however, supported the project, including several union construction laborers and representatives.

“We think this is a great project,” Tom Hansen of the electricians union said. “This is going to get Pittsburg the kind of building that they need.”

Former Mayor Merl Craft also spoke in support of the development.

“This project will bring upscale housing to this region that will generate millions of dollars in property tax revenue, provide funding for police and fire and provide millions of dollars for community benefits that will align with this council and the prior council’s goal of providing quality facilities and opportunities for youth and our seniors.”

Councilwoman Angelica Lopez said she supported the project after studying both sides and being assured that traffic and fire impacts would be mitigated along with other issues.

Mayor Shanelle Scales-Preston also supported the project but wanted a guarantee that the smallest lot size would be 6,000 square feet instead of the 4,000 etched in the plan. The developer agreed to that change, noting most of the lots would be larger.

In supporting the project, Councilman Jelani Killings said there are still “more processes to play out” as the land must be annexed to the city before the project can move forward.

“And so, we know that there’s still more work to do in terms of not only hearing the community’s concerns, but ensuring that this is a development that works for our community, that the infrastructure is there and that it works in a way that will benefit our community and our residents and the growth of our city,” he said.

# Contra Costa Fire reopens Pinole Fire Station 74 after 12 years

Updated on: March 3, 2023 / 11:03 AM / CBS/Bay City News Service

PINOLE – After being closed for 12 years, Pinole Fire Station 74 is holding a grand reopening ceremony at 11 a.m. Saturday.

The station technically reopened for business Tuesday. The station was closed in 2011 due to budget cuts. Funding will mostly be provided by Measure X, the county's most recent sales tax measure.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and the city of Pinole struck a deal last year for the district to provide fire and emergency services in the city, beginning this week. Pinole's other station, downtown's Station 73, is now also under Con Fire's care.

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) approved the contract unanimously in November. The county Board of Supervisors (acting as the fire district's board) and the Pinole City Council unanimously approved the deal in October.

Con Fire assumes responsibility for all firefighting staff, support staff, facilities and equipment for the city of 19,000 people. The contract went into effect Jan. 1 to allow two months of work getting the facility ready.

"Re-opening station 74 will enhance fire, rescue, and emergency medical services throughout West County, and it will be staffed by an engine crew operating both a standard structure fire engine and a specialized wildland fire engine," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, whose district 1 includes Pinole, in a statement. "My father died of cardiac arrest in 1987 after not getting medical care fast enough. I understand the importance of improving emergency response time since every minute can make the difference between life and death."

Con Fire said the benefits of the new arrangement will include more coordinated, cohesive and streamlined fire and emergency services. Another benefit will be better alignment of firefighting models across districts that could net both increased fire services and improved firefighter safety. The celebration and ribbon-cutting happens at 11 a.m. at the station, at 3700 Pinole Valley Road in Pinole. The event will be livestreamed on Con Fire's Facebook page, at [facebook.com/contracostafire](https://facebook.com/contracostafire).

# Long-shuttered Pinole Fire Station 74 reopens

*The Richmond Standard* - March 2, 2023



Photos from the March 1 reopening courtesy of the City of Pinole

**By Kathy Chouteau**

Pinole residents can celebrate the reopening of Pinole Fire Station 74, which had been closed since 2011 due to budget cuts, according to the City of Pinole. A Grand Opening ceremony is set for Sat., March 4 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the station, as the *Standard* previously [reported](#).

As of March 1, Con Fire took over firefighting staff, support staff, facilities and equipment duties previously associated with the former City of Pinole Fire Department, per the City. "The new dynamic is a major step toward improving fire and emergency medical services delivery in Pinole and across West County," the City stated on Facebook. The station reopening has occurred as the City's service area, people, apparatus and other resources have been consolidated from the former Pinole Fire into Con Fire, it added.

The merger is expected to improve fire and emergency services to Pinole's 19,000 residents, per fire officials, with Measure X funds contributing \$2 million to the fire station's reopening and ongoing staffing.



The Pinole City Council, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors acting as the Con Fire board, and the Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission approved the contract arrangement, per the city. As part of the contract, Fire Station 74 and other fire stations will retain city ownership and be leased by Con Fire.

"Among many improvements to fire, emergency medical services, and community risk reduction, are shortened response times, enhanced lifesaving capabilities, and the newly reopened Fire Station 74," said the City.

The City expressed its appreciation to the leadership team from the fire agencies and also to the elected officials for their "hard work and dedication to keeping our communities safe."

Pinole Fire Station 74 is located at 3700 Pinole Valley Rd. in Pinole. For more info, click [here](#).

